

## A Romance of Extraordinary Distinction

## THE MARSHAL

By Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

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(Continued from Monday.)

Battista's eyes turned to his master's like those of a faithful dog, trusting but not understanding. "What castle, my signor? Castelforte—the signor's own castle—what other?"

A sharp exclamation from Alixe summed up everything. "Your castle is confiscated; they use it as a prison. Francois is a prisoner there, Pietro! All these years—in your own home!"

"I never dreamed of that," Pietro spoke, thinking aloud. "Every other prison in Austria and Italy I have tried to find him in. I never dreamed of Castelforte."

And with that, as if pulling teeth, they got by slow degrees all that he knew from the little Battista. The letter, tight in Alixe's hand, was still unread; this living document seemed to bring them closer to their friend than even his written words. There were some things in the living letter, moreover, not to be found in the one of paper and ink. The little Battista, being put to the wall, told them what his father had told him, what the doctor of the prison had told his father. How the prisoner's health was failing; of that band of white in his dark hair; at last that the doctor had said to the big Battista that the prisoner could not live more than two or three years as things were; that even if released he might not regain his health, would not live, perhaps; that the only thing which could save him would be a long sea voyage.

"A long sea voyage!" Alixe groaned and put her face into her hands suddenly, and Pietro looked very sorrowful. "A long sea voyage for a political prisoner in the hands of the pitiless Austrians!"

At the end of the interview the little Battista put his hand into his breast pocket and brought out another letter, thickly folded. Would mademoiselle have him instructed where to find the mother of the signor prisoner? He had promised to put this into her own hands. He must do it before he touched food.

And Jean Philippe Molson, who had lurked discreetly back of the nearest stone vase, not missing a syllable, was given orders, and the huge little Battista was sent off to the stone steps between the scarlet flowers, up the velvet slope of lawn, in charge of the purple one.

Half an hour later the general walked up from the village, walked slowly, thoughtfully through the beech wood, his face hardly older than when he had come to Vicques, but sterner and sadder; his still soldierly gait less buoyant than it had been five years ago. There were voices coming to him down the wind through the trees. The general's keen eyes—as keen as Alixe's—searched the distant leafy dimness and made out shortly Alixe and Pietro hurrying to meet him. Why, he wondered to himself as the two young people swung through the wood—why had nothing more ever come of this long friendship? He felt that Pietro loved the girl; he knew that the girl loved Pietro, at least as a sister loves a brother. But she was not a sister; why had it gone no further? Alixe, now a very beautiful woman, a woman of a charm greater than beauty, had had many lovers, but no one of them had touched her heart, and this Frenchman and his daughter were on strange terms for a French family. So intimate, so equal had the two been always that the general would not have arranged a marriage for her as would any common father of his country. Alixe must have her free choice. Alixe was no ordinary girl to be happy in a marriage of convenience; she must have love, his Alixe.

But what was Pietro about? And what, moreover, was Alixe about? Did she care for him? Or—his heart sank at the thought—was it possible that her big warm heart was wearing itself out for a man dead or worse than dead—for Francois, shot by the Austrians, or else buried without hope in an Austrian fortress? The general went over this question many times as he walked or rode about the Valley Telesmontes, as he sat in the high den library, as he lay in bed at night and listened through the stillness to the Cheulte rushing down over its stones half a mile away. He wished above all other wishes to know Alixe married to Pietro; yet when he saw them together he was jealous for the memory of Francois, of his boy Francois, whose career had promised so brilliantly, whose dashing courage, whose strength and brains and beauty and charm had been his pride and delight almost as much as the brave bright character of Alixe. He himself had sent the boy away to keep him from Alixe. It might be he had sent him to his death; it might be he had spoiled Alixe's life as well. He could not tell.

He puzzled over it as he came up through the park—and then he saw Alixe and Pietro coming joyfully toward him, running, light-heartedly, calling to him with excited gay voices. It stabbed the general's heart; a quick thought came of that other who had been always with them, nor dead or worse, of that other whom these two had forgotten. And with that they were upon him, and Alixe was kissing him, hugging him, pushing a letter into his hand, up his sleeves, into his face—anywhere.

"Father—good news—the best news—almost the best! Father, be ready for the good news!"

"I am ready," the general growled impatiently. "What is this factory? Faibre de bois! What is your news, then, you silly child?"

And Alixe, shaking very much, laid her hand on his cheek and looked earnestly into his eyes. "Father, Francois is alive!"

For all his gruff self-control the general made the letter an excuse shortly to sit down. Queer, that a man's knees should suddenly bend and give way because of a thrill of rapture in a man's psychological make-up! But the general had to sit down. And then and there all that had been extracted from little Battista was rehearsed, and the letter read over from start to finish.

The letter, still kept in that cabinet in Virginia, told them all that had already been written or told, and which was of importance to this chronicle. But some of it was what has been quoted about the old days when the three children rode Coq in the park, and about the morning when the Marquis Zappi came with his little boy Pietro. The general, hearing that, was afflicted with all varieties of a cold, and Alixe choked, reading it, and broken down, and read again, half crying, half laughing.

"But he is alive, father! Alive! That is happiness enough to kill one. I never knew till now that I feared he was dead."

And the general, getting up and striding about fiercely, ripped out savage words such as should be avoided—many of them—and alternating with symptoms of sudden severe influenza. Then he whirled on the two.

"Alive—yes! But in prison—in that devil's hole of an old castle!" And Alixe looked at Pietro and laughed, but the general paid no attention. "He must be got out. There is no time to waste. Diab! He is perishing in that vile stable! What was that the lad said about the doctor's speech, that only a long sea voyage could save him? One must get him out, mon Dieu, quick!"

Alixe, her hand on his arm, put her head down on it suddenly and stood so for a moment, her face hidden. Pietro, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, looked at the general with wide gray eyes, considering. With that Alixe flashed up, turned on the young Italian, shaking her forefinger at him; her eyes shone blue fire.

"This is for you, Pietro. If we should lose him now, just as we have found him! Now is the time for you to show if you can be what is brave and strong, as Francois has shown. It is your castle! you must save him!"

Pietro looked at the girl, and the color crept through his cheeks, but he said nothing. "Alixe, my Alixe," her father put an arm around her. "One may not demand heroism as if it were bread and butter. Pietro will not fail us." (To be continued.)

## SOME NEWS NOTES.

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